



SHADOWS

(POEMS)

EMMANUEL FRU DOH

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

SHADOWS

Poems

Emmanuel Fru Doh



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*For Imani and Mayuri,
That we may always remember and someday begin to
understand....*

TO GOD ALMIGHTY BE PRAISE AND GLORY

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Preface

In life, we, as human beings, especially, undergo so many different experiences, and as a result, as the days come and go, set different goals for ourselves that we strive to achieve. As we forge on, there are moments when we think and are convinced we have succeeded in attaining a dream, only for us, sometime down the line, to feel a certain worthlessness that reduces our achievement to very little, a shadow of the real thing, or tragically still, nothing outright. The outcome is a certain emptiness that leaves one wondering what all the ado was about, in the first place, that resulted in naught or at best temporary flights of satisfaction. During these moments, however, the soul takes flight, grappling with dreams, illusions, and that which was once considered real.

Life, for me, has been a struggle to put my hands on something, the real thing, the truth, yet I have, unfortunately, found and continue to find achievements, ideas, things, and even people as mostly formless and without much substance, something hard and concrete to hold onto with trust, love, and conviction. Ideas remain malleable and keep shifting with the times and trends; things keep changing from state to state, only to degenerate ultimately into a lesser or completely worthless condition, and people, all too often, are not what they seem to be as guile, betrayal, and slander are typical of relationships, even between those who once loved and trusted. And so I, for one, continue to wander in quest and wonder at all this even though it is finally dawning on me that there is hardly much in this life: nothing real. One is dealing with the shadow of that which is real and only in the world beyond as I have been made to understand. This is true even if only in the sense that hardly much in life is permanent.

Accordingly, I have had numerous conversations with my soul at different hours and about different subjects in my

quest for meaning, truth, and credulity. These conversations with my pondering, disillusioned, and lamenting soul I have sometimes documented; it is some of these that I share with the world in this volume. These conversations with my soul, owing to strange encounters and equally bizarre experiences at times, have revealed this truth to me: we, as human beings, will never find rest on earth as all that there is and that we do amount to encounters and transactions with mere shadows; all is illusory at best. Until we shed the flesh, itself a shadow, only then shall we find the essential quality of earthly matter albeit in a surreal form—the divine essence. This quest, however, must continue because it engages the mind instead of leaving it idle and thus impaired. In this process, above all, many people learn and develop in readiness to receive that which is real and concrete—the truth.

Emmanuel Fru Doh

Century College, Minnesota
February 7th, 2011

TELLING AFRICA

When they talk of Africa,
You think of a termite hole,
Of my people as some strange species.
Our ways in alien colours they paint, castigating,
Then their ignorant laugh and celebrate our misery
Conjured by vain pens and minds, but
Some have a worried look; they know
The truth. Their people are telling mostly tales,
Tales about Africa, tales about Africans:
A people who know how to share,
A people not afraid of age and its wisdom,
A people who know the value of respect,
A humble people who love truly
And reserve their best for their guests.

This rich culture, damned by the district officer,
Their riches stolen by the commandant,
Poachers who took their women in the dark
And made their men work for nothing.
They have turned the story upside down
Making us look strange, stupid, and funny,
Yet they will not leave us alone,
One lie after the other. Today,
“For Africa,” they sing, even as the oil
Is scooped out in ship-spoons
With bloodied yet shimmering stones in their boots
From the land of the poor indeed.
The only truth is that of alien values
Now amidst the forest and the savannahs:
To kill an elephant and hide the tusks,
Or a buffalo and not tell the palace.

And where is the oil from the belly of the python?
The tiger's skin after the gutting?

GANG-RAPED

Now Africa is ridiculed and slighted,
With a smirk and a sneer treated.
There you lie noble lady,
A virgin raped and raped
Again and again and again,
Over and over and over again
By civilized nations taking turns;
Almost drained of your value,
Only for criminals to jibe and ridicule your plight,
The result of their felony.

But victory is yours woman;
You might have been raped
Your body violated
Your wealth looted,
Yet your dignity looms large,
Your spirit, despite all your woes,
Essence of your dignity never was scathed

Never into swag turned. They may have had you
Yet against your wish, your will then remains dignified.
Genuine intercourse is a dance for the body and the soul
The one could be raided, but the other only freely given:
The distance between rape and true love.

Therefore courage Africa, there is time,
The truth will eventually all out
And the felon corrected and educated
That he his error may acknowledge,
And genuine reconciliation sought.

No Hilary, we cannot forget things
Centuries old just because you say so.
From of old, errors must be acknowledge
And a price paid that the forces
Violated may be placated,
Only then do we begin to heal.
Such vainness only incenses.

OF CHANGING TIDES

Where are the tam-tams?
I hear them no more,
No more in the morning rising.
I hear them no more,
No more at the funerals praising
With messages for our ancestors,
No more at namings
Welcoming and celebrating babies
Arriving: Mother has returned—Yetunde!

Where are the tam-tams?
Even as I strain my lobes;
What strange rhythms are those
Bare of the voluptuous cadences
Of the tam-tam, the kora, the xylophones
On banana or plantain tree-trunks?
Where are the tam-tams?

THE ETOUDI EXAMPLE

Into pythons they
Have ballooned with years
In office, swallowing whole
State projects once thriving;
Swallowing whole national resources.
Cannibalistic *mbomas**
Dinosaurs to the state,
Liabilities to the national coffers
Shrinking! Shrinking! Shrinking!
All—pay cheques, allowances,
The value of all equals nothing,
Nothing to shameless moguls
Of dishonesty and patriotic
Malnourishment.

Only time can save the rest,
The nation choking with apathy
And corruption boiling over.

**Mboma* is a pidgin word for a python.

FON OF FONS IN BAMENDA

The sirens on numerous state cycles,
Uniformed zombies in their best,
Some reeking of alcohol:
The festive huzza for the New Deal prince.
Like a queen termite surrounded,
Overwhelmed he babbles a few
Summoning the Jack to mind.

Distinguished traditional leaders
Betray tradition: shaking hands
Here and there in reckless abandonment.
To weather the rising storm
In the questioning glances,
Made him Fon of Fons.
These gamblers, toying with
Our roots for worthless
Recognition. You are the
Ones who wished him long years,
Judging wine from the looks of the Calabash.

BIKUTSI LANDLORD

Coy master of deception,
Alhaji mistook your strategizing for devotion,
And so rather than the dreaded
Anglophone with the mark of transparency
You were handpicked and called king.
Then drunken by fresh power,
You peed on the people's National Union
Baptizing its orphans and bastards
Democrats on the move—Backwards!
Today the land of prawns is gasping, marked
By chaos, limb after limb sold
Like a slaughtered ram to alien cannibals.
Like driver ants a grasshopper, you and
Your hellish sects have devoured
Our once proud nation, and in your train,
Desperation, Mistrust, crime, insecurity,
Chop I chop.
Failure could never be improved upon.
What a waste! And then these last kicks
In the name of purging....

THE AFRICAN DINOSAUR

You were head of state when I was born.
The tedious investigative years of
Infancy and toddling have come and gone,
Even elementary is disappearing in the horizon
And I have your name continued to memorize
As head of state.
The years of understanding in secondary school,
High school, and then the University
Have left their bitter toll on my mind,
And yet you leech to that office
Twisting the rules of the game to
Legitimize your stay as silver and gold
Buy more days. Today I carry my son
And stare into his blank gaze and
There is your name still being blared forth
As head of state, your sickening portrait
Defaming public walls. Alas, our citizens
No longer smile but turn aside, your
Once appealing appellation now a scourge.
It is an illusion to buy time. See,
Your scalp once overwhelmed by rich black strands
Now still black but shrunken. Even a child
Can tell how much attention you give it
To fool yourself about your exuberance.
See the muscles of your visage, once firm
And spelling handsomeness now sagging,
Jaws turning into jowls like a bulldog.
Time is power; only the fool tries to
Corrupt it through pomades and the knife.
I hear the bell tolling; Etoudi must soon
Be evacuated and accountability

Rendered where cash holds no tender:

Ahidjo! Present!

Boigny! Present!

Mobutu! Present Sir!

Mbongo! Yes Sir, Present!

BOBOLO OATH

What is it you promised us back then
Just after Alhadji's donation to you?
In joy you scoured the country
Meeting the excited citizenry
Fed up with Alhadji's overstayed tenure.
We all looked up to you,
Thinking your heart and intentions
For the nation as beautiful as your face.
And so we ululated your motorcade,
Even the Obasinjom warrior chimed celebratory notes
And bells of hope as we readied our lives
In service to the nation to give under a new deal.
Yet soon, yes, soon you will leave us
Nothing to show for your rigour.
Nothing in the name of moralization
But tales of nightly Sabbatic gyrations and hellish rites;
Nothing for your exaggerated stay
With our airlines gone, SONARA dehydrated,
Our hospitals—slaughter houses,
The forest into a jagged lawn turned,
And the treasury a curettaged womb.
What was it you promised us again?

CHEAP TALK

People love to talk, about nothing,
Idle gossip in the main, it amazes me.
If only they told the truth!
People love to talk;
Nothing important—others.
They craft tales of destruction,
Slandering portrait after portrait;
The rewards I know not,
Yet unhealthy the effects on tellers,
On the slandered multiplied even as the truth
Belatedly will always out.
If only people will learn their tongues to purse,
Else let it be songs of praise,
Of encouragement, and words of gratitude
So humankind may flourish and God be praised.
Alas, people love to talk more about others,
Hacking at personalities searingly,
Lavishing verbal blows at absent
But dwarfing portraits of integrity.

DEATH AGAIN

This permanent sleep,
Dreaded for the pain it inflicts
For the helplessness it brings:
Reducing a man into tears
A woman into a teary top, and
Children into dust particles
Tossed about by the storm of pain,
Of deprivation.

A death is never forgotten
As each rain reminds you of
His activities as a husband, a father, a son.
A death cannot be forgotten as
Each harmattan is a reminder of
Her doings, as a wife, a mother, a daughter.

Although a journey into ancestry,
How this journey is dreaded:
It deprives the young of aged wisdom
And the old youthful support

And so wars we always must wage
Against this foremost foe,
Each time it strikes,
As warriors charge to and fro
Letting off their loaded guns
Their lances stabbing and slicing here and there
To hold death at bay.

But death will come when it will,
Uninvited though it be

Its target always the best.

LAGOS-IBADAN 2007

A possible last embrace with that citadel of learning—Ibadan.
Ipaja, Lagos, to UI gate. Transformation slapping
The face, the once upon a time express way par excellence
Now shrunken, partially re-conquered
By nature—the encroaching savannah.
The pools of muddy water in frequent depressions,
And where are those lanes, then
Majestic in white dotted garbs,
With trimmed edges guaranteeing distanced visibility?
This was an expressway *par excellence*,
With speedometers rapid pendulums.
Time, kleptocracy, neglect, have scorched this pearl;
Today it stands tormented like a war casualty
Its belly bloated potholes, its limbs shrunken,
Barely double lanes.
Disease spreading fast: like hedges, beautiful trucks,
Trailers pausing to catch their breath along interstate trails,
Line both sides of Lagos-Ibadan highway
Engendering ghastly crashes. So cars today crawl instead
Where once they cruised for only an hour—history!

Another spot, dead trucks and trailers, their carcasses
Decomposing on the sides like faeces from the belly of
This python; rain-shredded remains with people like maggots
Crawling and milling about.
But for the characteristic landmarks, this is some mere snake
Not the original African python of the beginning.
To those who were there, saw, and navigated Lagos-Ibadan
Time and neglect have defaced this beauty
Like tears a poorly make-up-layered visage.

THIS RUSH PALAVER

What is with this rushing habit?
See my people rushing about
And you will wonder why.
They rush into the *danfu*
They rush out of the *Moluwé*;
This rush palaver.

They rush into the plane
Even with seats assigned passengers
Even with flight attendants standing,
With many people behind in the cue
My people rush as if late
Only to sit and wait like others.
It is now our second name;
See how they treat us....
Oya slow down and enjoy life,
Leave early to be on time;
This rush-rush!

THE PERSECUTION

The children suffer in the sun hawking,
They suffer in the rain harvesting for the next trip
Yet the large ships dock day in day out doing business
With their country.

Parents toil day and night, barely able
The family to sustain on niggardly stately wages.
They wonder at the acres of tea
They wonder at the acres of banana
They wonder at the acres of cocoa
They wonder at the acres of palm kennel
They wonder at the acres of bleeding rubber trees
They wonder at thousands of timber loads
Rumbling past in defiance of the local population.
They hear of their nation trading in international markets,
Yet their harvest, their reward, is always poverty.
Some trek miles the cab fares to save,
Others struggle with wobbly cars they cannot maintain,
Not with four full tanks of petrol worth a month's salary
Yet they hear of SONARA producing oil
Only to witness on occasions a parade of expensive cars,
Purposeless escort motorcycles: the flamboyant entourage
Of a worthless prince, even as his people
Suffer in the midst of plenty.

This government is useless; all it does is waste
And never an account render to a frightened lot deficient of
Its rights in the face of legalized pilferers;
To thirst even with the rain, and despite the manna starve?
This persecution will end, yes it will!

THE THING ABOUT PROGRESS.

How we love progress but dread
That of a neighbour, yet progress is like
Palm oil; it will eventually reach
Other parts of the body through a single finger only.
Your neighbour's progress is yours,
Prop and push him up if he is climbing;
His leftovers at the least must reach you.
Stand not in the path of progress for tomorrow
Is a whole other time into which today must
Metamorphose, with or without your help, and
It had better be, else into a sore loser
Turn tormented by regret.

ÒYÌNBÓ NA WA

Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó say Africa poor, Africa too poor sef,
But na for Africa yi back them dey all time.
See that one them di call Firestone, na
Africa rubber them di use for motor tyre.
Òyìnbó na wa.

Òyìnbó na wa!

Them so-so shout say Africa poor
But na for Africa them di import coffee, tea,
Banana and plenty fruits wey them like;
How much them di pay sef? Na next to nothing.
When African man work, plant, harvest, and
Then ship these wonderful things for *Òyìnbó*
Land, them go take style make prices drop,
Then them blame some yeye man and woman
Wey them di call say Demand and Supply.
So again, them take our suffer go for nothing.
Òyìnbó na wa.

Òyìnbó na wa!

When shame catch them for this kind tif for day time,
Them go blame Wall Street. I go there to see the Wall
Make ye tell me where we go wrong, I no see any Wall.
I see na *Òyìnbó* them di shout, di call money like
Wéré for Aro Clinic for Ibadan.
Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó say Africa poor qwata-qwata,
But na for our forest them dey all time. See

France wey yi no get forest, them know-am for
Òyìnbó land say yi di supply wonderful wood. Na
Where France get this wood? Na Africa, Cameroon
Proper, but them di shout say we poor. Ah-ah Òyìnbó
People, wuna na wa!

Òyìnbó na wa!

Na Africa name them like sing all time for
Them news. Them say we poor better no dey,
But na for our backyard them di sleep for
Make 419. Na where Nigeria oil go? Na Òyìnbó.
Sey America don drunk oil for Guinea Equato?
And France di suffer purge-belle because of
Cameroon oil? Yet them no di gree; them own
Na to continue for sing say Africa poor.
Òyìnbó na chop wipe mouth for ground.
Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó na wa!

They come for Africa, turn we upside-down
We forget we country-fashion, now we be black
Òyìnbó them. The people turn our leaders
Into liars; capitalism and consumerism turn them
Into shameless thieves. Africa money na for Òyìnbó
Bank yi dey, and then foolish African leaders them follow
Buy property na for dey, them invest na for dey.
How Òyìnbó no go laugh we?
The one wey yi bad pass all, we di fight ourselves, even
Inside the same country. Tell me how we go grow;
Na Òyìnbó yi work for Africa be that.
Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó na wa!

From distance them di laugh at those fools
Wey them prefer other man to their own kind.
Yi prefer *Òyìnbó* to yi own kind, and so
Òyìnbó, ready to thief, come in and call the nonsense
Them di do, cooperation.
Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó na wa,
And so, as we sabi, we must think then whetin
For do for better ourselves. Because *Òyìnbó* help
No bi for nothing, we must think like Sense-Pass-king,
If no be so Africa go just stop for exist.
The people don finish us qwata-qwata be that.
Òyìnbó na wa!

Òyìnbó na wa.
Some people say the time to stop blaming *Òyìnbó*
Don reach; we must blame ourselves now.
But I think say that one na yeye talk, because even as
We di try now for do we own thing,
Òyìnbó still di put mouth for dey. How we go do stop
For blame them. Na true say our leaders them na nonsense,
But na who be their teacher? Na *Òyìnbó*!
Òyìnbó na wa.

EVEN BEFORE *PURGATORIO*

My name itself means love
And you woman, nominally Zachariah's,
Like a true mother I dealt with you,
But a piece of patched earth you are, your water,
Money. And so you demanded, and demanded,
Your reasons faked, thus a son to exploit.

By the lake at night, your *bothros*, you chant!
By the cross-roads, nocturnal palates you pacify,
Chthonic queen, commanding hellish legions
Bidding them destroy the innocent, destroy
The weak—those who failed your ravenous
Cash-palate—imposing curses, inflicting pain,
Torturing God's innocent.

But His hour has come, dusk to your
Hellish reign, a taste of your sentence
Yours for experience. Lazarus now can stare at you
In disbelief, with all your power-wealth.
Now the master speaketh, the rhythm of divine
Justice yours to dance to, right here on earth,
Even before *purgatorio*, God's mercy.

The farmer shall rip what he sows; see the blows
Falling. Where is your power now?
Love thy neighbour as thyself
And fear God lest you taste
The might of His justice.

Repent now woman even as the blows are
Beginning to fall from my shepherd's sceptre.

DISILLUSIONED

So much time has come and gone
And still I muse at your behaviour:
To condemn without hearing the
“Accused” out? And to claim we
Had been what we were.

After this Odyssey
On me imposed by man
Through which I plodded,
My life became a lonely bloody cell
With metaphysical bars restraining:
Victim of charity,
Victim of humility.

Thoughts of friends like you
Gave me hope and the will
To live. My prayers have
Ripped open holes in the walls
Of my physical, mental, and emotional
Cage, letting me out again to smile,
In apprehension though.

To you my friend, I rushed
Excited your intellectual depths
My plight will fathom and with
Understanding, how I imagined
With teary eyes this “prodigal” you
Will embrace and celebrate
My journey back from the dead

Free at last from Chthonia’s

Fangs of exploitation and torture.
Yet, when I stretched out my hands for help
From beneath the stygian deep
You pulled back without any care,
Baptizing my effort 'welcome but belated.'

And I am left hanging, betrayed where I
Trusted, even as I wonder at such a disposition
Where before I saw beauty, intelligence
And what I took for genuine concern.
Indeed life is an intricate mesh
Sometimes woven into bizarre patterns of
Time, emotions, and experiences.
I have learned and will continue
In my endeavour, human kind to understand.
The lawn is green and beautiful, I will not let
A browning patch destroy that knowledge.

BRETHREN

This my brother *
Who in time of peace
You hear naught of him;

At the moment of pain
Like a sleeping gorgon
He rears his serpentine head

And on he forges
Brandishing sword and shield,
For ever with determination

Havoc to raise
Hell to reawaken,
Thus his sunken ego bloat.

This Iscariotic concern
This Pilatic cleansing;
Where were you when

Like Gabriel the hellish legion
Trouble from your father's threshold
Could have been chased away?

And like the crocodile you weep
Only to distance your small-poxed id
To feed fat your hypocrite's ego

Fruit from the same African tree
Yet how far apart our tendencies, like
Dawn and darkness

This thing called common sense
How rare, and pride,
How damaging.

*It must be remembered that in most African cultures, to qualify someone a sibling does not necessarily mean being from the same womb.

THE WIND

Listen!

I hear the wind, like a river through the reeds

Whooshing by, rushing to nowhere

The fashioned words of gossips

Storming by, hissing against the pillars

Of one's integrity that tellers seek

To destroy, hoping in the process to bring one

Down to their jubilation. But with these roots

Deep in I-am-who-am, these are idle...

Mere breezes in the garbs of storms;

The Master is in the boat.

THIS VILLAGE-MENTALITY

We must forth from this tribal cocoon
Or be asphyxiated by its damning tentacles.
Why must my village matter?
Why not accept me for the citizen I am,
And treat me accordingly?
Why must it matter that Churchill twisted
My mentality for decades with the knowledge
And approval of the queen and civilized?
Why must it matter that de Gaulle,
While dreaming of Napoleonic feats,
Had the Legionnaires burn down our
Villages, exploited my parents for a meaningless
Medal and a worthless parliamentary seat?
Our nation must like the ocean be,
Her myriad children rivers draining
Into her, empowering her to supply for the
National welfare. Beyond this village-
Mentality stride and at the Nation's edge
Settle and strive as a people,
Else dismember yourself by villages
And, thus, incapacitated rot amidst plenty.

THE POST OFFICE

There was a time in this triangle one could mail a letter
And it would be delivered;
There was a time one could mail a postcard
And it would be delivered.
There was a time the letter contained cash
And it was delivered—on time even.
Not so today: letters are fire and our post offices
Rocks by promethean versions tormented.
Letters are late if they get there at all,
Usually chopped off at the edges
For security reasons, they argue.
But then the cash is no longer secured.
An envelope of pictures vanishes into
Thin air—it contained no cash and so
Valuable family pictures are trashed. Proof of
A family's history obliterated by a worthless brigand.
The envelope contained only printed matter,
No cash—and so valuable documents go missing,
Leaving scholars without certificates,
Baptized first communicants and the confirmed
Without the Bishop's imprimatur.
Let the eagles on more liver feed, after all
Amour Mezam, Guarantee, Transportation
Lines offer better services.
What a shame!

LIGHTED WATERS

See the electricity corporation worker
With huge bulbs in his yard,
The bulbs in his house lighted all day long;
The water corporation staff can shower
For hours without worries,
Bathe their cars without trepidation,
Even water their gardens for hours on end.
Yet I, their neighbour, can only watch
From afar, wondering at such fringe
Benefits when I can only light a room
At a time—where the family is gathered;
I can barely afford drinking water.
For everything else, my family is armed,
Armed with an array of gigantic containers
Waiting for the rains, heaven's largesse,
So I can mop my floors and flush my toilets.
What discrepancies, yet we belong
To the same fatherland.

CONSULTATION

I do not know any doctor,
So I sit and sit watching
As the rich bypass me into consultation,
As powerful people in town
With banknote-walled palms and pockets
Shamelessly greet me waiting in line
With the rest of the scum of our society,
So they think, and go into consultation.
Dr. Braggart Arrogance sees
Nothing wrong with this. Why waste
His academic time with me?
What can I offer him from povertyville?
At last, with hours having come and gone,
I stagger in bushed, hungry, and dazed.
The doctor perseveres through my
Exhausted consultation but touches not.
He prescribes like a god caring less
About the cost of his choices, even when
Cheaper versions exist.
To hurry me out, up he stands,
Slings his stethoscope about his neck learnedly,
About his shoulders, his lab coat.
I rush out as god emerges for rounds,
A rich smile now on his once sour face.
These our doctors

LOSING TRACK

And this arrogant generation,
When children mistake pictures for reality
And Shadows for the form;
They think adults they've become
Because into all they've rushed.
You can hear them making claims
That dwarf their years,
Challenging their parents because
An alien culture calls it freedom.

They think the world has become one
Because they hear of "aid" and "globalization".
Yet the ships show up with poisonous finished
Products and leave with cherished raw materials
Harvested for next to nothing.
The claims are still being made
Of people coming together and being one
But that's all to it.

How am I now to convince my bearded son,
That Victoria harboured ships before the cape?
That Victoria sparkled at dusk, perfumed
By the smell of cooking oil in
Atlantic's breadth powdering faces
Windward.

How am I to convince an age that will
Not listen because of alien ways,
That Limbe is Victoria's skeleton.
Choked to death by blighted
Politics powered by factionalism

Churned by our colonial heritage?
Like impotent baboons at the foot of the mountain
We have stood by and watched our land
Raped, our plantations taken over,
Yoke shredded sterile before our eyes,
Santa Coffee returned to dust,
The Buea Upper Farms swallowed by the bushes
Even as Mount Fako weeps tears of lava,
Only to make do with divisive doctrines
Like orangutans acclimatizing to new names
And associations, forgetting our roots.
In that case Ekok should bare moronic
Celebratory fangs when associated with Calabar.

We belong to the same tree and
Must this message drum into our future,
Less tomorrow our children be bastards
Re-casted by political barbarians and sell-outs.
Buea was our capital;
Victoria our economic capital.
Only then are we a people else
Second generation natives be with
Heads drooping in shame.

Listen! Listen to the voices from combusted graves!
Listen and let age guide you, listen!
Listen and with your parents dine after purgation.

FALLING DOWN

Before me you smile, rub your hands
And wriggle your body in sterile humility,
Only to stab me in the back
And think you have won.
But time, that great arbiter
Has vindicated me.
Who seeing you then would
Have thought humility would
One day be choked down your
Throat; but is that not the
Psalmist's warning?

THIS RIVALRY

You must know I have led my life
Simply following the tide of time as
The nights come and go, knowing
Little about role models, beyond
My parents and their plain wisdom
Otherwise a pathfinder condemned to be.

You must know I waded the tides
Of time in the embrace of peers mainly,
With whom I propped here and there
With invisible antlers feeling our way
All over the place and forging one
Guided by prayerful lines.

You must know that I compete with
None but my dreams and those of
Sages long gone, and then I apply
Myself while totting the Marian beads
Begging for her maternal intercession
And being the Mother that she is,

Her powerful intercession yields thus fruits
Making me who I am, crowning
Me with fleeces I asked for.
If you had asked for my secret
I would have told you:
I set a goal, work, and pray for it.

ON BEING JUDGMENTAL

Why do you claim to know me
Even before you've met me?
Why do you damn and call me arrogant
Even before you have spoken to me?
You judge me based on hearsay?
You know not what John did to me.
You know not what I to Mary did.
Hey, walk up to me, talk to me
And find out with time, from me, who I am.
Even then, never judge less you
Be judged by Him who sees and knows
All. I am not God,
So in me you will find faults;
Use what you find good and dump the rest.
I am only human with toddling
Strides in the wake of the Nazarene.

THE RAINBOW

He is the architect and the design His,
And each spirit He fabricates, He decorates,
But my hue has become my cross,
So determined by man,
My albatross that follows me about
In rain and shine to alight on my back
Wherever I go.
But I am the better; I carry my cross willingly,
Like the Master its inconveniences,
And there are many. Notwithstanding,
I am the better, I carry my cross smiling,
Denying to fight my oppressors
Who my all have desecrated
Because of their whims.
But slowly the meaning of colour
They are grasping and now are bowed in shame
For their deeds to me. In return I smile
At their enlightenment even with the weal on my
Back and furrows of dignifying pain on my visage.
It is all a divine gift, the symbol of my nobility,
The source of their enlightenment,
The path to wisdom.

STRANGE TREASURES

How now we treasure the wrong things,
How now we celebrate mediocrity like fawning curs,
Singing panegyrics in acknowledgment of marauders
Of our nation's coffers;
Carting car-loads of bleating sheep and goats at dusk
To the kitchen of ogres distributing national thrones
That amongst the chosen our names may be announced
To man a position of power. Shamelessly we return,
We return gloating in the success of our treason
And so lord it over our fellow citizens.
Even then, how we hate to be of service, with
Arrogance as our trademark before our compatriots
Who must beg and grovel before us
To earn services we are paid to render.
Alas, we are accountable to those goat-trips
And other supplies from the regions
Mountaining in the Ogre's store, and so to hell
With the scavenging citizenry.
When shall we learn and savour the taste of
Joy generated by services rendered to the needy?
The anger of heaven will soon arise and pave the way
For a new breed that like the Master
Shall wash the feet of wretches.

BLOOD

On the native soil where value is in the spirit
And not machined ephemerals,
The blood of a chicken draws forth
Power from a lesser deity, that
Of a goat or a bull from a bigger deity,
And that of a person is priceless;
Yet here where I am today trapped by
The powerful currents of alienating
Socio-political and economic waves,
I see human beings murdered on the whim.
A tranquilizer for a rampaging mountain lion,
A bullet for the setting sons of God Almighty
In the name of duty and then away
Home to your milky spouse and
Downy kids. Proud of yourself?
Even though there is a mother wailing
In pain for the untimely death of her son?
A young wife staring unseeingly at her
Now fatherless brood, dreading the
Symbols of her once lively matrimonial bed?
This system may set you free but
The judge whose sentence is without emotions,
Who prizes to the smallest of his creatures,
He is yet to be confronted.

THE NEWS OF DEATH

Forced by the whims of national bastards
To abandon Africa's breasts for alien nipples,
On foreign shores estranged, I stand stranded,
Perplexed at how we have become strangers
In the face of native values. The greatest pain
The news of countless deaths from
The alleys of my local shores, at
Whose funerals I cannot participate
And my heart blazes like a furnace,
As every now and then, I shed lonely
Tears for departed comrades fallen
Even before I could set eyes on them
Again in years. How sad, alienated
By my quest for 'greener' pastures.
Who will recognize me when at last
I return, after years at the front
With contemporaries marching on at this rate?

WHISPERS FROM BEYOND

After years, so many years
Of a metamorphic cycle
In an academic cocoon,
Then fertile and mature enough
For the orgasmic fertilization
Of my embryonic nation,
Alas into a migrant labourer
Turned away from my mother's embrace
By unpatriotic dictators, political gamblers,
Filth cum democratic mongers.

Alas, away from you mother
The milic distance slashed
By cascading waves,
In an alien embrace I look back
Full of painful love for your ways,
Your mores, which are mine,
Norms that fed and couched my id.
Now more than ever mother
Your beauty blooms in my mind;
Consider not this sojourn a betrayal
But my odyssey from which
Stronger will I emerge and
Forever seal my servile embrace
With yours, Isis.

PLAYING FOX

During this bleak moment
When all seems lost, at best at stake,
With despair as king,
During this hour
When the ray of hope
A faint flicker has become,

The true nature of man
I discern: the architect of woe,
Master of untruths

Or else how, how,
How after all these promises, these
Chameleons swallow back their puke?

If not serpents they are,
Then why all this treachery, guile,
Why this verbal wriggling,

Voluntarily swearing this
Only to do that?
Yes, minions they are

As David's ego they fear
My person they dread
By these potentials tortured.

But Iscariots,
That which God has ordained
Will be,

Or else He is not God.
Therefore, promises make not
Pretending Samaritans to be.

By mothers misled,
Tutored in the art of envy,
The craft of backstabbing

Others Envy's sons
Who would not see another climb
But the ladder from underneath withdraw.

Trust not the idle words of freaks
For men indeed are from their
Deeds known not idle blabbering.

But God's hour is the best
Lazarus king to make, or
Joseph Pharaoh's number one.

And then you Iscariots
Shall fling along time's corridor
Your forty pieces of silver in vain reparation

As there are things that
Must never be done or said even
As a wound, a scar it must, alas, leave behind.

Now I know
That true admirers are far apart
As humankind is largely guile,

True Sir Russells.

But by God I will laugh
And last too.

THE GONG

(In the wake of Kwasen Gwangwa'a)

Time has crawled by
And I hear not the gong of the town crier,
Yet I to the palace piazza walk in expectation.
And there lies the gong, but where is the
Owner? I see the kora, the wind
Sieving through its dirt-coated strings
That once were plucked by the fingers of the master;
The banana stems of the xylophone shrunken
And the note-woods splitting—the anger of the sun.
On all, layers of dust, the sentence of the harmattan;
What tales to perform? What songs to dance to
Without the custodian of our lore?

It is fate *Ba!* It is fate!
Your work you did well, archiving
The rhythms of the grasses of the savannahs,
The rhythms of the trees of the forests,
The rhythms of the sands of the desert,
The rhythms of the waves washing against our shores.
You left us scrolls on who we are,
Documentaries of our metamorphosis
In the tormented panorama of time.
And to you it was just the beginning,
And to us the realization, with smiles
Of accomplishment donning our lips, but
To *Nyikob*, the hour hand had run its course;
The sand to the bottom of the glass had drained,
And so your call it was this time

Ah CRTV clarion, yet the silence echoes

Of fearful tales to tell of the man who used to tell,
Of fearful tales to tell of the man who used to show,
Whose gong, whose kora, whose xylophone now lie
In the palace piazza, the villagers looking on in speculation,
Shock and disbelief on their phizogs
The meaning of this timeless blow.
Yo mbońkad Ba!

WITHIN FISSURES

(For *Eugene Yande Ndefru*, *geologist extraordinaire*)

Like a meteor you rose, dwarfing so many in pursuit,
In character stable and forthright; in spite of the waves,
Disciplined: that sense of purpose, that sense of what is right.
A will to uprightness nothing seemed able to bend,
Even falling in love became incongruous.
Yet before the sun was overhead, darkness fell: Yande
Succumbed. But forge on *L'homme*,
Now fissured in the belly of the rocks you loved,
Do your sampling, but the findings must wait.
Soon Yande, soon and again
Twin sons of harvest shall we be.
But for now guide and protect them, your seeds,
Cham-Cham and those after him.
My friend, my brother,
Guide and protect Jane, your co-farmer.

I WILL REMEMBER YOU

(For Professor Moses Fon Asanji)

I will remember you for your charm,
For your charisma, that gentle smile
You always had on even when the going was
Rough, with your eyes blinking in rapid succession
As you calm yourself, taking in all.
I will remember you.

I will remember you as an academic boss
Who treated his colleagues like peers
Instead of underlings depending on you
For much, even after-meeting refreshments
Which during your tenure were lavished?
I will remember you.

I will remember you as the director who had
His students and institution at heart.
Was it not you who gave Bambili its
First structure in over thirty years,
Thirty years of plenty with nothing to show?
I will remember you.

I will remember you as a fantastic host
Who pooled us all to parties of sorts
Celebrating this or that even if it meant just to meet
And socialize; how we ate, danced, and forgot
Our woes in your generous house.
I will remember you.

I will remember you as a man, with a
Heart, who listened and felt the pain
Of those about him, a veritable scholar

And good teacher, yes, a down to earth
Friend, forever willing to be of assistance.
I will remember you.

I will remember you as human after all, with your
Own faults that come nowhere near Peter's, he who
Denied Christ thrice after all the years by His side.
I know the Master will see the good you were, like Peter,
And blaze your mistakes with a drop of His divine blood.
I will remember you.

I will remember that from you I learned a lot;
I learned a lot from you as a man,
Scholar, and administrator and even in your
Death, I learn. Adieu dear friend,
Until we meet to trod the Universe forever.
I will continue to remember you.

NZALE

(For Tabu Ley Rochereau)

As the sounds of Africa
Ripple and course through my
Body into my soul,
I nod in acknowledgement;
Indeed, Africa is the heart of rhythms
And to so many do we owe this.
But listen to Rochereau's *Nzale* and many more
And see what I mean.
Le vrai Seigneur!

All else are faint echoes,
Echoes of Africa's heartbeat.
As you listen, remember Tabu Ley is
In mourning; mourning the
Passing of a young girl which occurred
Too soon. This was music, it
Is, and will always be.

Thanks Rochereau for touching the inner me.
Thanks to the Congo for giving us this rare gem.
Thanks Africa for bringing meaning into life.
Yet I mourn because of our treacherous leaders
Who deny us the right to soar,
Eagles that we are. They deny believing
In themselves, believing in us.
And so Maître Luambo Makiadi always wept,
Giants who knew the meaning of sound
And how well its threads to weave.

ROLL-CALL '71

(On the occasion of the class of 1971's first reunion in New Orleans, USA, in 2008)

The years in decades have rolled by
And time, weeping, sweating, bleeding,
Yielded forth a rich harvest
From a bunch of boys that once rallied together
In the days of yore,
The Class of '71.

From the very first years
The Master tilled his vineyard
Redirecting along different paths,
Others maintained in stride, that
Afterwards a rich harvest may emerge:
Spouses, fathers, doctors, teachers, entertainers,
Accountants, businessmen, and more;
The Class of '71.

We were young and childish, sometimes
Ridiculously or else tragically so; our
Pranks, still current, will reveal, but
On that day, as *preps*, when we arrived severally,
Began a journey that forged a bond between us,
Transforming a bunch of clueless fledglings
Into a band determined to survive,
The Class of '71.

And onward we marched, plodding,
Falling and regaining our steps with eyes set
On the blazing horizon: at times as individuals

At times together, at times smiling and laughing
At times weeping and shedding tears of temporary disaster,
The Class of '71.

Even as the years came and went
With significant transformation in our
Lonely abodes and travails—academic and professional
Setbacks and successes—spouses, children, and none,
Baldness, greyness, sickness and health,
We have held on to that bond that made us
The Class of '71.

The bullying we answered to as *preps*,
Remarkable senior students, the beautiful campus,
Bread and butter with jars of tea for breakfast and
That occasional encounter with *Kadem*,
The mumbling and grumbling in the face of authority,
Marinus, barbwire, winter, all; Sunday and daily Mass,
Benediction and *Tantum Ergos*, only to
Crash on a veritable *tête du poisson*
The Class of '71.

In the journey of life, with the tides and storms
We have held hands physically, spiritually, for support,
Confident that with St. Joseph ever near, progress
Is ours, success ours. And so thirty-seven years after,
Here we are at New Orleans, together again
For another roll-call. Some have answered present
In person, others from afar, yet others remain mute,
Their earthly journey at an end;
Even so, here we stand on their behalf, banner in hand, of
that unique bunch:
The Class of '71.

For those present, for those gone,
We remain grateful to God and thankful as always,
And to St. Joseph our patron: together again
We stand and stare at features redeconstructed by time,
By experience, by the journey of life. Yet we see
Traces, the foundations, of those young men during
The first roll-call thirty-seven years ago,
And we celebrate for having been there for each other,
In thought at least, for being here today for each other,
In person this time and yet in thought for others.
The Class of '71.

We are a proud bunch, even as we remember
That the fingers of one hand are not the same
And so have accepted each other even with our faults,
Our weaknesses, our strengths, for we are products of
St. Joseph's College, Sasse, by the Buea Mountain,
The Class of 71.

And so God be praised forever.

LONE WARRIOR

For Albert Womah Mukong (Visionary amidst Cyclops).

And now Mukong, at the
Dusky threshold of your plight,
Battle against kleptocrats,
Battle against treasonable felons,
The picture is beginning to be clear,
The meaning of your struggles,
The value of your sacrifice.
In the face of our betrayal,
You alone stood your ground
Refusing a part of it to be
As peers pitched in with Iscariots
A piece of the silver to taste.
In jail you rot ignored by
Compatriots, friends even, yet
Alone in your convictions you
Stood; time proved you right.
You may not have won completely,
Lone warrior, but your effort
Proclaimed your roots—a people
Who know their taste. Rest that
Body even as echoes of your
Struggles continue resounding from
The man-made walls surrounding
Our hijacked existence.

ON BEING AN ADULT

The Iroko is not an Iroko because of its height alone
Else a eucalyptus tree may be mistaken for one.
A bear on all fours, even with all its fur, cannot
Be mistaken for a lion, not without its mane,
Not without the kingly roar and grunting.
The Rhinoceros may be mistaken for a hippopotamus
Without the horns on its face but
A cheetah cannot pass for a leopard
Even with all its marks, nor a mamba
For a python because of its length.
A true adult lies not in one's looks only:
It is in one's character, the way one does one's things.
Nor does an adult defecate in his pants
Unless the end is near.

YESTERDAY

Yesterday, ever so beautiful,
Forever so heart-warming,
I hear echoes of you today
In the songs I listen to,
In the songs I sing after,
And my heart wells with nostalgia.
Yesterday, ever so lovely,
Forever so ideal,
I see shadows of you today
In the friends I listen to,
In the friends I talk with
In the winds blowing past,
And my eyes are flooded.
There are times I long for
Those moments, but this is today
And tomorrow, the mystery, is on its way.
How I miss you, yesterday!

IGWE OCHA I

You, maiden from Garden City,
Sister to the plug that sparks,
You who gently whispered in acquiescence
'I am human,' how from time to time
My solitary heart hungers for those days,
The light you brought into the last hours
Of my odyssey. Our time together was brief
Yet profound. I watched you blossom, your
Confidence colossal, your simple sophistication
Intimidating. How I long for those days, Nneka.
And so I wonder what games nature
Has up its sleeve, tantalizing us
Only to toss distance and fate in between.
How I recall those dusky strolls, and can still savour
The echoes of all, of all, of everything good
Even those frustrating encounters when you trusted
And so soared above any doubts. The years have come
And gone, and not even a word about you,
But I hear that name in the wind whenever
All is quiet and my soul left to itself
Liberated from the qualms of life awake—Nneka!
'There is no sunshine with you gone, and how
You've gone so long.' Blessings to you my friend!!

IGWE OCHA II

In the layers of years gone by already
I see your gentle smile, and hear
That voice of power and authority,
Yet you too were only human you declared,
Wanting to be held,
Thirsting to be loved,
With a smile that radiated confidence
That body gentle, effeminate, and trusting.
Beyond that, your mind was sharp,
Your dialectical engagements charming.
To be beautiful and intelligent,
Shy yet confident, gentle yet poised,
How so long since those years—Okus!

THE LIGHTHOUSE

(For Professor Milton and Mrs. Judith Krieger)

In the hour so bleak with eyes searching
The horizon of life, you that ray of hope,
Free of scholastic aristocratic hypocrisy,
That sense of direction, the stirring sun
At dawn, in the moment so daunting,
She that whiff of fresh air bringing about
Hope, despair thawing. Retrace your African
Strides, and see the gratitude wafting
Your way from those struggling and striving;
The genuine smiles of appreciation decorating
Memories of you from faces once weighed
Down by the tears of despair, the
Absence of hope. May you thrive,
Your children and your children's children.
May people wake up to you, husband and wife
Who have the tears from so many
Cheeks in silence dried. It must not a whole nation
Be, but to the very least of my brothers and
The Master's reward awaits you.

PEOPLE FOR HELEP

(For Professor Milton and Mrs. Judith Krieger)

Na dis thing make them say
No judge person the way wey you di see-am.
Òyínbó say you no fit know whether book
Good from the cover;
Milton Krieger, Man for people.

I first meet this Professor for Abakwa
I come bend my nose for am, I say to myself na
Òyínbó like the rest; I sure say yi dey Africa for
Gain yi own thing, then tomorrow yi go write
Nonsense about Africa; soon yi go begin make
White man, and me I no di take that doti.

But as day di go, I come see say the man
Simple time no dey. As you see yi the first day
Yi di smile and welcome you, na so di man remain
With all people for inside Abakwa.
Yi even suffer with we for time for State of Emergency,
Mbi Mvondo yi gift for Bamenda,
The place wey di yeye man call-am say na yi second home.
Still I no want gree say this man and yi woman,
Prof. Krieger and Ma Ju, them good.
I say yi di make good because na Africa yi dey.
I say na dis kind you go meet-am back for white
Man country and yi go begin talk for you through the nose,
Yeye man! Na so I member for ma heart.
Na so I be di think, so I just leave the man,
I no visit-am again for Abakwa.
My colleagues them di go dey, I no go.

As always di man yi wife, Ma Ju
As them di call yi for Abakwa, yi di welcome wuna
With beer and then yi go say “Milt go join
Wuna soon.” And then di woman go go di do
Yi own thing for back.

Na for America my heart change qwata-qwata
About dis man and yi wife. Hei! See di people yi and
Yi wife them don help but them no shout-am like other
Yeye Òyìnbó people. For America sef-sef, Prof Krieger
And Ma Ju them no change; na di same people wey I meet
For Abakwa. For true, Prof. simple pass di way wey yi be
Dey for Abakwa; the man di talk plenty na about Africa
And he want for hear news about Cameroon, especially.
Some time self, Prof di try for knack na pidgin with me.
I laugh-am, and then I tell yi say Prof,
Na so I di call yi for show respect for yi age
You di try, but your Whiteman accent still dey. Yi laugh!
Ma Ju too di try pidgin some half-half time them.
Wonderful people!

Na for America I come see say this man and yi woman
Them simple time no dey;
Na di same people wey I know back for Abakwa.
Even self, for Abakwa them be di hold back small
Because of how culture different so make them
No make mistake some man vex.
But Krieger them simple, and for helep other people
Na all that wey them want do if Them fit.
Plenty Abakwa people fit laugh today because of Prof.
Krieger and yi wife—Ma Ju.
I want salute wuna two, and thank
Wuna for public; if I be be chief like I give wuna red feather

For graffi land. Make wuna continue so,
Na God go pay wuna....
I know say we go so-so see wuna for Abakwa
As day them di pass. I salute wuna—people for helep!

THESE TIDES

(For Mrs. Jane Ndefu)

Jane! May be you wonder about this silence.
True, I was there when you were from amidst
Plenty harvested by the hawkish vision
Of an extraordinary soul;
I was there and made so much noise
When both became one.
Alas he took leave of me in a
Hadean embrace, emasculated by my lot.
Yet I pray daily for his repose and for your wellbeing
And that of the kids into adults suddenly turned.
We could have been present,
But here we are rotting in exile,
Washed ashore by strange patriotic tides
And existential winds of cataclysmic propulsions.
We think of you daily when for Yande we look up in prayers.
We know not why the Master at times craves unripe fruits,
Yet we belong to Him and so can only praise His taste.
May Yande always be by you and your offspring.

THE BOOMERANG

(For Mbella Sonne Dipoko)

For whatever reason the boomerang leaves the hand,
It soars, executes its mission and returns to base.
Like this tool-weapon Africa's messenger you were,
At a time when our pride was being tampered with
By the pilfering colonialists.
Like the boomerang you soared, the truth to tell
Of the visibility of the African son,
Of the beauty and potency of his blackness;
Like a true warrior you waded the currents,
Bulwarks before your colour strewn
Reminding them of the strength of the lion,
The swiftness of the cheetah,
The nurturing of the baobab, even as time ebbed.
And when your duty had been accomplished,
To your roots you returned that the
Rightful owner the dregs of your years
May consume and take pride, fittingly,
In a son well-groomed like well-tapped palm wine,
And so you served the land until our
Ancestors beckoned. Africa shall refill the
Gourd so generations to come will continue
To drink your wisdom, boomeranged soul!

THE HARVEST

The harvester is abroad clawing left and right;
The ripe fruits thud on the lawn below.
Every now and then with a thud, loud, heavy,
Light, muffled, a mature fruit drops: Foncha!
Muna! Mukong! Ntumazah! Vedzekov! Bongwa!
And though we coil and recoil
In pain and near frustration,
These have in many ways pollinated
The world, shooting forth seeds—
Religious and secular alike—that
Have authenticated farming seasons
Of surpluses. These tears then only
Celebrate the departure of patriarchs
Who blazed the earth serving man
To the best of their abilities.

THE SOUNDS OF AFRICA

From borrowed shores,
Determined my Odyssey to end,
Into Ipaja I travelled.
The morning quiet, without
The characteristic summons of *Allahu Akbar*
I could breathe the silence,
Hear the chirping of rising birds,
And the sky with cloudy lids sluggishly
Blinked its burnished cyclopean glare.
That scene of childhood days in the fields of corn
And sweet potatoes were once more summoned
To the fore, the song of another bird:

Numo tuchu ku-ku
Numo tuchu ku-ku
Numo tuchu ku-ku

That plea of baby bird:

Mother a caterpillar catch it-catch it
Mother a caterpillar catch it-catch it
Mother a caterpillar catch it-catch it.

Waves of the past wafted themselves
Like butterflies of anticipation in my stomach;
I recalled decades before
With Father and Mother in the fields,
Before fertilizers in the fields of
Smoking *ankare** cooking sweet potatoes,
Being told the meaning of that unique cooing
Of a yet to be identified bird,

But this is Ipaja, Lagos, the belly of a metropolis.
So from whence is that farm bird's voice?
True, this is Africa indeed, the sounds of my youth,
The throbbings of Buea, of Bamenda, in Lagos
Brought home recognition—Africa!
Africa, the land where nature speaks.

**Ankare*, a Mankon word, refers to a former furrow which is turned into a ridge by scooping in earth and dry grass from the neighbouring ridges on either side of one of the previous year's furrows. The grass in the centre of this new ridge is usually lighted so it burns slowly with the resultant ashes serving as a natural fertilizer. In the process of the buried grass burning slowly, parents seize the opportunity to roast sweet potatoes for the children to eat when they begin to get hungry while they are in the f.

DICOTS

(For Imani and Mayuri)

Twin buds from the baobab,
Dicots from planted seeds,
You made me come alive,
My heart beating with joy;
This new red feather
Crowning my black skullcap.
You made me come alive
Like the festive drums during naming,
And how we yearned for your
Knock on the door of life,
How we longed the screams
Of arrival to savour.

My grandpa walk, rehearsed
Already, was a while to wait.
The storms before you, cascading;
The noise about you, defaming decibels
Shrouding your paternal joys
The tradition-yapping morons about you
Barbed wires in your path
Even as Ma and Grandma laboured;
The support of cherishing friends abundant,
All in great expectations.

Alas, it was not to be yet as
Vain winds of pride and hypocrisy
Blocked your path and held you back,
And the joys of those who love went sour:
Sunset even before dawn.
May these tears fertilize your

Next attempt at journeying out,
May you learn to hear only the blessings,
May you listen only to the words of sanity
And ignore the narcissistic brouhaha on dogma,
So-called traditional dictates by imps,
Fledglings in the paths of our ancestors.

When next you set out, Imani,
Let your mother's love be armour
To your decision to journey,
Let your father's love, Mayuri,
The northern star be and
Navigate you through to life.
Noise is part of life
So plug your ears and come
To love that welcomes,
The love that cherishes.

ON BEING A TEACHER

As a teacher, I'm saying
I have frequented a tiny part of God's kingdom;
It means I have been at it over and over
To understand how vast is His wisdom.

As a teacher, I mean I'm not the best; I'm saying
I fell and fell trying to conquer until I learned
I could not do it alone. The Master had to lend me
His hand and my students, their cooperation.

As a teacher, I'm confirming the narrowness
Of what I have a good understanding of;
I'm in fact only saying I know
What it takes to understand even a little.

As a teacher, I've been on a long journey
And I remember well where I stumbled:
The potholes, the dust, mud, and sludge even,
And I want to navigate you to avoid these.

As a teacher, I have learned mastery over
My temper, the knowledge that only a few
Students and parents value us; to the rest
I am a mere teacher whose salary they think they pay.

As a teacher some students disrespect me
Sometimes. But then I think of Christ.
As a teacher some parents slight us; I smile,
Because their children's future is in my hands.

As a teacher, even my employers care

Less about me. I am only a means
To their wealth and the popularity of
Their institution; this is the truth.

Yes, as a teacher, I train others
They graduate and make ten times more;
When they fail, I'm a bad teacher,
When they succeed they worked hard.

As a teacher, I am always a teacher;
My joy lies in knowing that I am serving,
To the few who remember my effort, that's
My reward, the real pay cheque—I am a teacher.

As a teacher, I don't think that I know all,
I am in fact excited if I can be challenged,
Respectfully, by my student,
Like Niyi Osundare taught and urged me to do,

Like Dan Izevbaye permitted me to do,
Like Robert Wren confirmed and confessed in class.
As a teacher I would have succeeded
If my students can smile in the course

Of their journey whenever they think of me,
Else a noble course have I betrayed.
As a teacher I can smile after all these years
Looking back in time and cringing only occasionally,

But for the better part I can smile in victory
As I into so many faces from time to time do stare,
And encomiums on me alight from successful
Pupils now masters in their specialties.

Yet there are those, even if unacknowledged,
That as a teacher I must not have touched;
Mea culpa! I was only trying to be a teacher
And by now they all know what manner of job it is.

CONSUMMATION

Consummation,
Be that which it is
A physical relationship
A gesture by organs, muscles and limbs,
It remains a powerful display.

How it hurts
When wrongly directed
As then no longer love
But a betrayal it turns to be.

Yet what a paradoxical creation:
Sex will bring life
And will life take away;
So pleasing it could be
In the hands of those who love
So destructive in the hands of players.

This meaningful yet meaningless
Epicentre of human activities,
A summation of life:
Incomprehensible!

HOW TO LOVE

It is easy to love, as easy
As breathing: only see you
In your neighbour, and you will love.
Look at how needy she is
And share with her
And you have loved.

See how lonely he is
Sick, old, and tired, or even in
Prison; visit him, serve him,
And you have loved.

Without homes they trudge:
No food, no warmth, the harsh weather;
Invite them in and soup them
And you have loved.

Away from you look, listen,
Speak, and share;
Away from you serve and console
And you have loved, loved well

The Master in His brethren!

THE CRAFTSMAN

How subtle, yet how profound your métier;
Slowly yet steadily you weave your tale,
The meaning and moral of which dawns
On the eve of the end.
With great skill you edge your message,
Knitting on our bodies, our visages especially,
Your tales of sorts: sadness, pain, anguish,
Joy, delight, bliss, as in and out, in and out, in and out
Of that unique canvas, the hourly threads merge, shaping
This wrinkle here, that curve there, a dent!
A shade darker here—stress-quoted,
A shade lighter there—relief-tainted,
With once upon a time bituminous strands
Now sporadically splashed in gray,
Else richly scrapped skin-tones.
At dusk your nearly finished tale,
Your well-polished lines and furrows,
Layers and bags of flesh tell,
On our visages especially, time's art:
Our frowns, coils of skin,
Our smiles wrinkled grooves of
Profound joy and wisdom, of subtle tales
On pain and pleasure, of times and life on earth.
Look at me at this dusk of mixed feelings and see
Time's tale on my body, on my visage, my strands.
This journey, so loaded, plods on with lessons
For eternity. Praise to the Master for making
Examples and profound lessons of us.
Now in joy, trepidation, as we tarry
Waiting for the supreme subpoena,
We sit and reminisce of battles fought,

Of losses and victories savoured,
And of lessons learnt.
Like the elders we have become,
We now hold the spear
Pointing in the direction posterity must follow,
The bridegroom to meet, that all else
May be added; the choice is theirs.

RHYTHM IN OUR SEASONS

If the dry season it be,
Then darkness shies away by mid morning
With faint rays of dawn, like toddlers,
Moving in with unsure steps.
At last, sure that darkness has receded,
They summon in their master,
The tropical sun, to thaw away
Traces of the morning dew, footprints of darkness.
The day attains maturity
With the sun directly overhead,
But nothing lasts forever;
The beautiful sun's brief death
Commences from its throne overhead as
It begins its descent into the grave.
Gradually it is deprived of both
Its heat and luminaries
And then darkness sets in,
But before it can itself establish in power,
The rays of dawn would such hopes dash.
And so the cycle continues
But darkness is the more aggressive
As there are times when to
Destroy the brilliance of the sun's
Activities, it unleashes rain;
Hence the African rainy season.
But not even the rain
Remains forever; it stops after
Exhausting itself and there again
Is the dry season.

TO GENTLE LABOUR

Like the wind
She storms from machine to machine
Without food nor rest,
Toiling all nine hours of her shift.

Like the sun
She radiates control over
The parts she produces,
Over the machines she commands.
So firm she appears to be,
So determined her schedule to keep,
But like the moon at dusk
She glows when teased.

Be the wind in your determination
Be the sun in your warmth
Be the moon in your distance
Even then I know your heart to be gentle,
I know you know there is a heart around
All sick for your attention.

How he detests those cold and heartless
Machines those caring hands of yours
Caress for hours on end,
Wishing their place to fill.

Say something
And not just gentle smiles radiate
For words may sometimes
Louder than actions speak:
Far beyond the scope of one's sight

Words will travel and be heard,
Words will get to places one's feet
Cannot attain.

THE TRAIL

This journey so tedious,
Of plains stretching as far as the eyes can see,
Of hills so high into the sky
And valleys deep into the belly of the sea;
Yet onward humankind must toil,
Marching on and on across plains,
Climbing and descending;
To the one a journey by day
To the other by night
To the one a journey into the unknown
To yet another, a divine quest.

“Shadows, as the title insinuates, splits open and lays bare the frightening vision of humanity, the heart of man depressed, a veritable inferno in which there is little to be enjoyed and everything to be endured, as all is vanity, a gnawing emptiness. Nothing is but what it seems. Simple but without being simplistic, there is in the damp climate of Dob’s poetry broken promises, displaced emotional centres, a pervading sense of doom, of impending disaster, and a total helplessness reminiscent of Plato’s proverbial mythical cave in which all reality is but shadow, devoid of substance, with the observer chained to the walls of his feelings, beliefs, and unfulfilled ambitions. The second section, “Celebration”, is, however, a source of warmth, of light, the sun’s rays in an otherwise damp and dark collection.”

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